

Laurel Canyon: Haven of Peace, Love and Military Intelligence

[John Wear](#)



During the first week of August 1964, warships under the command of U.S. Adm. George Stephen Morrison allegedly came under attack while patrolling the Tonkin Gulf off Vietnam. This attack was later called the Tonkin Gulf Incident. Although this attack probably never took place, it was used as an excuse to start the Vietnam War. [\[1\]](#)

Meanwhile, in the early months of 1965, an astounding number of musicians, singers and songwriters suddenly moved to a geographically and socially isolated community known as Laurel Canyon in Los Angeles. Within months, the “hippie/flower child” movement started in Laurel Canyon and began to protest the Vietnam War. [\[2\]](#) This article will show that this so-called peace movement was likely controlled by the same military/intelligence community that instigated the Vietnam War.

Musicians

One of the most iconic, controversial, critically acclaimed and influential figures to take up residence in Laurel Canyon was Jim Morrison of the band the Doors. Jim Morrison also happens to be the son of the aforementioned Adm. George Stephen Morrison. So while the father actively conspired to fabricate an incident that started the Vietnam War, his son moved to Laurel Canyon and became an icon of the peace/anti-war movement. [\[3\]](#)

John Phillips also moved to Laurel Canyon and played a major role in spreading the emerging “counterculture” across America. Phillips helped organize the Monterey Pop Festival and wrote the popular song *San Francisco*, which were both instrumental in luring the disaffected to San Francisco to create the Haight-Ashbury phenomenon and the 1967 Summer of Love. John Phillips was the son of U.S. Marine Corps Capt. Claude Andrew Phillips, and attended a series of elite military prep schools in the Washington, D.C. area, culminating in his appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis. [\[4\]](#)

Ellen Naomi Cohen, better known as Cass Elliot, was a childhood friend of John Phillips’s nephew. Elliot was born in Baltimore but grew up in Alexandria and attended the same high school as Phillips. John Phillips, Michelle Phillips, Denny Doherty and Cass Elliot formed the highly popular Laurel Canyon band the Mamas and the Papas. [\[5\]](#)

Stephen Stills was a founding member of two of Laurel Canyon's most-acclaimed and beloved bands: Buffalo Springfield and Crosby, Stills & Nash. He was the product of yet another career military family, and was educated primarily at schools on military bases and at elite military academies. Stephen Stills claimed to have served in Vietnam before moving to Laurel Canyon and becoming an icon of the peace movement.[\[6\]](#)

David Crosby was one of Laurel Canyon's most-flamboyant residents and a founding member of the Byrds as well as Crosby, Stills & Nash. Crosby is the son of World War II military-intelligence officer and Annapolis graduate Maj. Floyd Delafield Crosby. Crosby's family tree includes numerous U.S. senators and congressmen, governors, mayors, Supreme Court justices, members of the Continental Congress, and high-ranking Masons. If there is a network of elite families that has shaped national and world events for generations, it is likely that David Crosby is a bloodline member of that network.[\[7\]](#)

Jackson Browne, who became a star of the Laurel Canyon scene a few years later, is also the scion of a career military family. Browne was born in a military hospital in Heidelberg, Germany because his father had been assigned to postwar reconstruction work in Germany.[\[8\]](#)

The three members of the band America—Gerry Beckley, Dan Peek and Dewey Bunnell—were also Laurel Canyon residents whose fathers were all members of the military/intelligence community. The three met in West Ruislip near London, where their fathers worked at the West Ruislip U.S. Air Force base, a facility deeply involved in intelligence operations.[\[9\]](#)

Mike Nesmith of the Monkees and Cory Wells of Three Dog Night both arrived in Laurel Canyon after serving with the U.S. Air Force. Gram Parsons, who briefly replaced David Crosby in the Byrds, was also a Laurel Canyon resident and the son of a decorated military officer and bomber pilot.[\[10\]](#)

Frank Zappa was Laurel Canyon's father figure during the early years of its heyday. Although many of his recording artists were obscure, some such as psychedelic rocker Alice Cooper went on to superstardom. Zappa's father was a chemical-warfare specialist assigned to the Edgewood Arsenal near Baltimore, Maryland. The Edgewood Arsenal is the longtime home of America's chemical-warfare program and is frequently cited as being enmeshed in MK/ULTRA operations.[\[11\]](#)

Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys bought his first real home in Laurel Canyon in 1965. Wilson was heavily influenced by the work of Phil Spector, whose crack team of studio musicians, dubbed the Wrecking Crew, provided the instrumental tracks for countless albums by Laurel Canyon bands.[\[12\]](#)

David McGowan wrote:

All these folks gathered nearly simultaneously along the narrow, winding roads of Laurel Canyon. They came from across the country—although the Washington, D.C. area was noticeably over-represented—as well as from Canada and England, and, in at least one case, all the way from Nazi Germany. They came even though, at the time, there was no music industry in Los Angeles. They came even though, at the time, there was no live music scene to speak of. They came even though, in retrospect, there was no discernible reason for them to do so.[\[13\]](#)

Film

Lookout Mountain Laboratory was also located in Laurel Canyon. Originally envisioned as a fortified air-defense center, this facility by 1947 featured a fully operational movie studio that included sound

stages, screening rooms, film-processing labs, editing facilities, an animation department and 17 climate-controlled film vaults. This studio produced approximately 19,000 classified motion pictures over its lifetime—more than all the Hollywood studios combined. [\[14\]](#)

Lookout Mountain Laboratory apparently had an advanced research and development department that was on the cutting edge of new film technologies such as 3-D effects. Hollywood luminaries including John Ford, Jimmy Stewart, Howard Hawks, Ronald Reagan, Bing Crosby, Walt Disney, Hedda Hopper and Marilyn Monroe worked at the facility on undisclosed projects. The facility also employed up to 250 producers, directors, technicians, editors, animators, etc.—all with top security clearances. [\[15\]](#)

Laurel Canyon in the 1950s was home to leading actors such as Marlon Brando, James Dean, and James Coburn. It was also home to Natalie Wood, who lived in the same home that Cass Elliot would later turn into a Laurel Canyon party house. Other former Laurel Canyon residents connected to the film industry include W.C. Fields, Mary Astor, Roscoe Arbuckle, Errol Flynn, Orson Welles and Robert Mitchum. [\[16\]](#)

A group that played a key role in promoting the new Laurel Canyon bands was Hollywood's so-called Young Turks. This group included Peter Fonda, Jack Nicholson, Bruce Dern, Dennis Hopper and Warren Beatty, along with their female counterparts such as Jane Fonda, Nancy Sinatra and Sharon Tate. Many of these Hollywood stars forged very close bonds with the Laurel Canyon musicians, and some purchased homes in Laurel Canyon so that they could live and party among the rock stars. [\[17\]](#)

As with the Laurel Canyon musicians, the Young Turks had impressive establishment credentials. Bruce Dern's godparents were Eleanor Roosevelt and two-time Democratic presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson. Dern's mother was the sister of Archibald MacLeish, who held several offices in the Roosevelt Administration and was a member of the Skull and Bones society. [\[18\]](#)

Peter and Jane Fonda's father, Henry Fonda, was a decorated U.S. Naval Intelligence officer during World War II and was once married to a Rothschild descendent. Dennis Hopper's father was employed by military intelligence and was in the OSS during World War II. Sharon Tate was the daughter of career U.S. Army intelligence officer Lt. Col. Paul Tate, and Nancy Sinatra's father, Frank Sinatra, had many associations with known Mafia figures. [\[19\]](#)

David McGowan wrote:

Let's wrap up this chapter with a quick review of what we have learned about the people populating Laurel Canyon in the mid-to-late 1960s. We know that one subset of residents was a large group of musicians who all decided, nearly simultaneously, to flood into the canyon. The most prominent members of this group were, to an overwhelming degree, the sons and daughters of the military/intelligence community. We also know that mingled in with them were the young stars of Hollywood, who also were, to an astonishing degree, the sons and daughters of the military/intelligence community. And, finally, we know that also in the mix were scores of military/intelligence personnel who operated out of the facility known as Lookout Mountain Laboratory.

I've got to say that, given the relatively small size of Laurel Canyon, I'm beginning to wonder if there was any room left over for any normal folks who might have wanted to live the rock'n'roll lifestyle. [\[20\]](#)

Deaths

The “hippie/flower child” movement was supposed to be about peace, love and gentleness. Unfortunately, an astonishingly large number of Laurel Canyon residents suffered premature and often violent deaths.

The Charles Manson Family murders of Sharon Tate, Stephen Parent, Jay Sebring, Voytek Frykowski and Abigail Folger at 10050 Cielo Drive in Benedict Canyon had deep ties to Laurel Canyon. Frykowski and Folger lived in Laurel Canyon, and Jay Sebring’s hair salon sat right at the mouth of Laurel Canyon. Sharon Tate frequently visited friends in Laurel Canyon such as John Phillips, Cass Elliot and Abigail Folger, and when Tate wasn’t in Laurel Canyon, many of the Laurel Canyon residents visited her place on Cielo Drive.[\[21\]](#)

The unsolved murder of four people on July 1, 1981 at Wonderland Avenue in Laurel Canyon is regarded by Los Angeles homicide detectives as the most-brutal multiple murder in the city’s history. Ron Launius, Billy Deverell, Joy Miller and Barbara Richardson all died from extensive blunt-force trauma injuries. Only Launius’s wife, Susan Launius, miraculously survived the attack.[\[22\]](#)

These murders are hardly unique. For example, Diane Linkletter (daughter of Art Linkletter), comedian Lenny Bruce, actor Sal Mineo, actress Inger Stevens, and actor Ramon Novarro were all found dead in their homes, either in or at the mouth of Laurel Canyon, in the decade between 1966 and 1976. While only two of these people are officially listed as murder victims, it is likely that all five were murdered in their Laurel Canyon homes.[\[23\]](#)

Numerous other people connected to Laurel Canyon died during this period, often under very questionable circumstances. The list includes, but is certainly not limited to, all of the following people:

- 1) Marina Elizabeth Habe, whose body was carved up and tossed into the heavy brush in Laurel Canyon on December 30, 1968;
- 2) Christine Hinton, a girlfriend of David Crosby, who was killed in a head-on collision on September 30, 1969;
- 3) Jane Doe #59, a teenage girl who was never identified, found dumped into the heavy undergrowth of Laurel Canyon in November 1969. She had been stabbed 157 times in the chest and throat;
- 4) Alan Wilson of the Laurel Canyon band Canned Heat was found dead on September 3, 1970 at age 27. Wilson had moved to Topanga Canyon after the band’s Laurel Canyon home burned to the ground. Wilson’s former bandmate, Bob Hite, also died of a heart attack at age 36;
- 5) Brandon DeWilde, a friend of David Crosby and Gram Parsons, died in a freak accident in Colorado on July 6, 1972;
- 6) Christine Frka, the Zappa family’s former housekeeper, died in her early twenties of an alleged drug overdose;
- 7) Danny Whitten, who was with Neil Young’s band Crazy Horse, died of an overdose on November 18, 1972 at age 29;
- 8) Bruce Berry, a roadie for Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, died of a heroin overdose in June 1973;

- 9) Clarence White, a 29-year-old guitarist who had played with the Kentucky Colonels and the Byrds, was run over and killed on July 14, 1973;
- 10) Gram Parsons allegedly overdosed on a speedball on September 19, 1973;
- 11) Amy Gossage, Graham Nash's 20-year-old girlfriend, was stabbed to death in her San Francisco home on February 13, 1975;
- 12) Tim Buckley, a singer/songwriter signed to Frank Zappa's record label, died of a reported overdose on June 29, 1975;
- 13) Phyllis Major Browne, the 30-year-old wife of Jackson Browne, reportedly overdosed on barbiturates on March 25, 1976;
- 14) Cass Elliot died in London at age 32, allegedly of heart failure. Some think she was killed because she knew too much;
- 15) Judee Sill, who sold a song to the Laurel Canyon band the Turtles and worked on an album in Mike Nesmith's recording studio, died in November 1979 at age 35;
- 16) Steve Brandt, a friend of John Phillips, allegedly overdosed on barbiturates in November 1969;
- 17) Ricky Nelson, who had lived in Laurel Canyon, died in an unusual plane crash on December 31, 1985;
- 18) John Denver, whose father was a career U.S. Air Force officer, moved to Los Angeles in 1964 and became part of the Laurel Canyon scene. Denver died in 1997 when his self-piloted plane crashed soon after taking off from Monterey Airport;
- 19) Sonny Bono, who began his Hollywood career as a lieutenant for Phil Spector, died on January 5, 1998, after purportedly skiing into a tree;
- 20) Phil Hartman, who had substantial ties to the early Laurel Canyon scene, was murdered in his Encino home on May 28, 1998;
- 21) Lawrence Eugene "Larry" Williams was found dead in his Laurel Canyon home on January 7, 1980, with a gunshot wound to his head;
- 22) Brian Cole, bass player for the Laurel Canyon band the Association, was found dead on August 2, 1972, of a reported heroin overdose;
- 23) Lowell George, who had worked with Frank Zappa, died of a heart attack on June 29, 1979 at age 34;
- 24) Tim Hardin, a Laurel Canyon musician and close associate of Frank Zappa, died of a reported drug overdose on December 29, 1980 at age 39;
- 25) Natalie Wood, who died on November 29, 1981 in a drowning incident at Catalina Island that has never been adequately explained. Wood was 43 when she was laid to rest.

Also, as is widely known, Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin all died at Age 27 under questionable circumstances. [\[24\]](#)

On December 6, 1969, occasional Laurel Canyon residents Mick Jagger and Keith Richards along with permanent Laurel Canyon residents Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young staged a free concert at a desolate speedway known as Altamont. Four people died and another 850 people were injured at this concert. These deaths and injuries were caused mostly by members of the Hell's Angels, who had ostensibly been hired by the Rolling Stones to provide security. Since it was widely known that the Hell's Angels club was openly hostile to hippies and anti-war activists, the selection of this motorcycle club to provide security was probably done for malicious reasons.[\[25\]](#)

Conclusion

Many of the Laurel Canyon stars were openly using and dealing in illegal substances. The state could have utilized its law-enforcement and criminal-justice powers to silence many of its most prominent voices. However, that never happened. For example, David Crosby acknowledged that "the DEA could have popped me for interstate transport of dope or dealing lots of times and never did." John Phillips, who was busted for drug trafficking and thought he would receive a 45-year sentence, served only 24 days in a minimum-security prison.[\[26\]](#)

The state also could have used the draft to silence its war critics. After all, there was a war going on, and hundreds of thousands of young men were being sent to Vietnam. However, none of the Laurel Canyon stars had their careers interrupted by the Vietnam War. The tricks used unsuccessfully by thousands of young men across the country to avoid the draft always seemed to work for the Laurel Canyon crowd.[\[27\]](#)

The state, working hand-in-hand with corporate America, also had the power to prevent the musical icons of the 1960s from ever becoming the megastars they became. The mass media could have easily prevented the entire countercultural movement from getting off the ground since it controlled the channels of communication. Instead, the mass media actively promoted the Laurel Canyon stars.[\[28\]](#) Books such as *The Greening of America* were even written to promote the ridiculous idea that the new countercultural icons were representatives of an advanced social consciousness.[\[29\]](#)

Vladimir Lenin once stated: "The best way to control the opposition is to lead it ourselves."[\[30\]](#) The evidence indicates that the peace movement of the 1960s was not a grass-roots challenge to the Vietnam War. Rather, the "hippie/flower-child" movement was a fake opposition that could be easily controlled and neutralized. The Laurel Canyon musicians and other leaders of the countercultural movement were typically as much a part of the military/intelligence community as the people they were supposedly opposing.[\[31\]](#)

A version of this article appeared previously in the Barnes Review.

Notes

[\[1\]](#) McGowan, David, *Weird Scenes inside the Canyon: Laurel Canyon, Covert Ops & the Dark Heart of the Hippie Dream*, London: Headpress, pp. 11-12.

[\[2\]](#) *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[\[3\]](#) *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[\[4\]](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

- [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 205-207
- [6] *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
- [7] *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
- [8] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- [9] *Ibid.*
- [10] *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
- [11] *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
- [12] *Ibid.*, pp. 137, 254.
- [13] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- [14] *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.
- [15] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- [16] *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
- [17] *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.
- [18] *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.
- [19] *Ibid.*, pp. 90-92.
- [20] *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- [21] *Ibid.*, pp. 26-28.
- [22] *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 28, 115; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wonderland_murders.
- [23] *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.
- [24] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-37, 41-43, 109-118.
- [25] *Ibid.*, pp. 179-182.
- [26] *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- [27] *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- [28] *Ibid.*
- [29] Reich, Charles, *The Greening of America*, New York: Bantam Books, 1971.
- [30] <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/38974-the-best-way-to-control-the-opposition-is-to-lead>.
- [31] McGowan, David, *op. cit*, pp. 23-24.

Author(s): [John Wear](#)

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